

# *The Status of Indigenous Women in Policing: A Queensland Case Study*

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## *Abstract*

A key recommendation of the 1991 report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody was the employment of more Indigenous police officers, especially women, in part as a strategy to reduce the over-representation of Indigenous people in the criminal justice system. This article examines the working out of this recommendation in the Queensland Police Service by analysing the Indigenous employment process and by surveying 56 Indigenous female officers. The results of the study showed that Indigenous female officers reported high levels of acceptance by colleagues and their communities. There was little reported evidence of systemic racial or sexual discrimination. However, there was some reported harassment by respondents during training and within the workplace, with Police Liaison Officers reporting higher levels of job dissatisfaction. The policy implications of the study include the need for a more focused recruitment process, the possible benefits of a mentoring support program, and the need to enhance the status and functions of Police Liaison Officers.\*\*

## **Background**

Historically, the police-Indigenous relationship has been problematic. Dozens of laws, regulations and procedures have been introduced by state and federal governments since the early 1800s in order to oppress and control the everyday lives of Indigenous people (Mazerolle et al 2003). Wooten (1991) suggests that, as a result of this punitive control, the police became the most constant and repressive contact with the Aboriginal community, leading to fear and aversion. Colonial policies of repression and dispossession saw the police carrying out functions against Indigenous people that were normally under the jurisdiction of the military (Cunneen 2001; Findlay 2004). These policies further reinforced the view that Aboriginal culture was inferior and required regulation (Cunneen 2001; Finnane 1994; Haebich 2000). The ‘protectors’ — those overseeing the welfare of Indigenous people — were often police officers with extensive powers conveyed to them through the administration of government policies and formal legal powers, both of which

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\*\* Note: The word ‘Indigenous’ is used in the Australian context to refer to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander officers of the Queensland Police Service as it was not possible to differentiate between the two groups in the official records provided.

led to the criminalisation of Indigenous people on the basis of their race (Blagg 2008; Cunneen 2001; Kamira 1999).

The 'over-policing' of Indigenous people became a contentious issue in the 1980s and 1990s, with a number of state and national reports as well as academic literature drawing attention to crucial issues surrounding Indigenous-police relations (Cunneen 1992, 2001; Cunneen and Libesman 1995; Pilkington 2009). Conversely, 'under-policing' has also been seen as a problem in Indigenous communities (Cunneen 2001; Gordon et al 2002). Indigenous people are not only over-represented in the criminal justice system as offenders, they are also over-represented as victims (Rudin 2007). Under-policing is particularly evident with respect to violence against women (Homel et al 1999). Aboriginal women claim that police generally do not regard matters of family violence as important, and that they are often seen as less worthy victims by the police; thus requests for assistance are often ignored or downplayed (Rudin 2007).

The Indigenous population in 2011 was 2.5 per cent of the total Australian population (ABS 2011b). However, Indigenous people are still significantly over-represented within the criminal justice system (Blagg 2008; Blagg and Valuri 2004; Cunneen 2001; Johnston 1992; Woodward 2003). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples account for just over one-quarter (26 per cent) of the total Australian prison population (ABS 2012). Police responses to incidents involving Indigenous people have highlighted an apparent lack of cultural awareness when dealing with communities (O'Rourke 2002) and thus it has been suggested that a more personalised police service is required (Payne 1990).

The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody was instrumental in highlighting this significant over-representation of Indigenous people in the criminal justice system in Australia. A key recommendation of the Inquiry was the employment of more Indigenous police officers, with the proviso that 'particular attention be paid to the recruitment of women officers' (Commonwealth 1991:vol 4 [29.7.2]). The rationale behind this recommendation was not explicitly described, but there was an implied assumption that Indigenous female officers would be more effective in relating to Indigenous people, whether offenders or victims of crime. In theory, along with the deployment of Indigenous male officers, this might contribute to reduced offending and reduced reliance on arrest and incarceration — including arrests for resisting arrest and disobeying police directives. The recommendation regarding women police also fits with the theme of under-policing in the Royal Commission report, in terms of provision of better service to Indigenous victims of crime. Employment equity itself appears not to have been part of the rationale, although employment in policing can also be seen as part of the recommendation for greater public sector employment of Indigenous people, with a view to breaking the relationship between unemployment and crime (Commonwealth 1991:vol 4 [34.2.16]).

In terms of facilitating Indigenous employment in policing, Recommendation 229 of the Royal Commission report states that Indigenous persons should be recruited in supportive groups, and Recommendation 230 encourages police to introduce bridging courses for applicants who meet all criteria except education standards. Recommendation 231 also encourages each jurisdiction to find the best means of facilitating better police-Aborigine relations through the employment of 'police aides, police liaison officers and in other ways; experimenting and adjusting in the light of the experience of other services and applying what seems to work best in particular circumstances' (1991:vol 4 [29.7.3]).

The Royal Commission drove a variety of Indigenous recruitment initiatives in Australian policing, with mixed success (Day et al 2004). This is not surprising, given there is a well-known range of obstacles to the integration of Indigenous people into policing in

post-colonial societies. The historically contentious relationship between the two groups has generated ongoing alienation and mutual suspicion (Cunneen 2001; Day et al 2004; Wootten 1991). The Royal Commission referred to ‘the strain of an ambiguous position’ for serving officers, and the view among some Indigenous people that members who joined the police had ‘joined the enemy’ (Commonwealth 1991:vol 4 [29.7.2]; see also Juntunen et al 2001). Specific barriers can also apply within police organisations, such as lack of access to leave for customary obligations (Riley 2002). Day et al’s (2004) Australian study found that retention of Indigenous staff in the criminal justice system was compromised by both position-specific considerations — such as poor career opportunities, low pay and lack of recognition of prior learning — and contextual issues — such as lack of support outside the workplace. To date, there has been no Australian study specifically regarding female Indigenous officers.

The international literature addresses intersectional issues associated with race and gender, in particular the double disadvantage caused by being female and of racial or ethnic minority status (Haarr and Morash 1999; Martin and Jurik 2007; Morash and Haarr 1995). Women police are often accused of lacking the physical capability to undertake police work. There is also a growing literature on the problems of under-recognition of the work of police employees in liaison or ‘Special Constable’ roles (Caless 2007; Cherney and Chui 2007, 2010, 2011). Nonetheless, the way gender and race interact to intensify disadvantage has received limited attention in Australian criminology given that the experiences of Indigenous or colonised women are historically different from that of other minorities (Behrendt 1993). This also applies to the ‘triple disadvantage’ likely to be experienced by Indigenous women police in auxiliary roles. Assignment to remote locations can add a further layer of complexity.

With these issues in mind, Queensland is a useful site for a case-study analysis of Indigenous women police, given the State has a relatively large Indigenous population, including many located in communities in regional and remote areas. The 2011 Census found there were 155 825 Indigenous persons in Queensland, accounting for 3.6 per cent of the population (ABS 2011a).

### *History of policing in Queensland*

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as part of the colony of New South Wales, and later as the colony of Queensland (from 1859), the area saw many of the excesses of the Native Police deployments, with Indigenous officers under white command engaged in summary punishment and repressive ‘dispersals’ of Indigenous peoples (Cunneen 2001; Finnane 2005; Reynolds 1990; Richards 2008). Relations between police and Indigenous people in 20<sup>th</sup>-century Queensland were marked by ongoing conflict, with the continuation of total control policies under the guise of ‘protection’. Police were in the frontline of this process, and police recruitment was largely restricted to white males, with the exception of the employment of some Aboriginal trackers (Johnston 1992:197ff). Indigenous ‘Special Constables’ were introduced in 1939, and more developed forms of ‘Aboriginal Community Police Forces’ were introduced in 1984 (Commonwealth 1991:vol 4 [29.7.19]ff). However, the Royal Commission condemned the community police system. Officers were employed by local councils, but supervised by police, with confusion about who was in charge. The officers also lacked adequate powers, received no training and were very poorly paid, and the system was used to plug the gap of grossly inadequate police services.

An Indigenous Police Liaison Officer (‘PLO’) scheme was introduced in Queensland in 1992 as an outcome of the Royal Commission. Cherney and Chui’s (2007) study

identified 133 PLOs, and the program had by then been enlarged to include officers from diverse ethnic backgrounds. At the time, 85 per cent of PLOs were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (Cherney and Chui 2007:6). In 2009, the Crime and Misconduct Commission reported on a major review of crime and policing in Indigenous communities in Queensland, repeating many of the Royal Commission's themes of over- and under-policing. The report found that PLOs were not effectively utilised and were often rejected by Indigenous communities (Crime and Misconduct Commission 2009:169). The review supported enlargement of the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Police ('QATSIP') scheme, with greater powers, status and support given to Indigenous officers engaged in patrol, dispute resolution and enforcement of local government by-laws (see also Cunneen et al 2005:183–7).

The history of women police in Queensland also involves a story of intense discrimination. The first female police appointments in Australia were in New South Wales and South Australia in 1915, but Queensland Police resisted the innovation until it was forced on them by the government in 1931 (Prenzler 1998). Women police, however, remained a tiny minority, with inferior employment conditions, and they remained unsworn until 1965. There were a number of advances and reversals in gender integration until a full employment equity regime was forced on the Police Service by the recommendations of the Fitzgerald (1989) corruption inquiry and subsequent equal opportunity legislation in the early 1990s. Since then Queensland has at times been among the best jurisdictions in terms of employing and promoting women, but the momentum has been lost in recent years with recruit numbers stuck at one-third, only very small increases in senior appointments, and overall numbers of sworn female officers at 25.1 per cent in 2008 (Prenzler et al 2010).

### *Theories of disadvantage*

When examining the lack of Indigenous women in policing, it is important to consider theories which look at the underlying reasons which have contributed to the disadvantage of these women within the policing organisation. This, in turn, can suggest methods for reform and/or improvement. When looking at policing as a profession, the literature has often suggested that the culture of both the organisation and the occupation have contributed to how women and those in minority groups have been treated. This is frequently attributed to an informal layer of values and norms which operate under the hierarchically rigid and militaristic structure of policing (Chan 1997; Chan 1999; Findlay 2004; Loftus 2010; Rabe-Hemp 2011). As Brown states, 'whilst operational policing and its management may have changed, the masculine ethos of police officers has not' (2007:205). As an occupation, policing has accepted violence as a method of resolving disputes, as well as promoting hierarchies of dominance and authority and supporting displays of sexism and racism (Brown and Heidensohn 2000; Paoline 2003; Prenzler 1997). This can place Indigenous women in a position where both their race and gender contribute to more marginal treatment within the organisation.

Tokenism theory posits that Indigenous women are afforded the special position of 'double tokens' in a historically male-dominated environment (Gustafson 2008:5). Research has predominantly found that female and racial minority tokens felt the need to prove their worth by working harder than their counterparts, as they felt that they were always under scrutiny (Kanter 1977a; Ott 1989; Strohshine and Brandl 2011; Yoder 2002; Yoder and Berendsen 2011). Assimilation, according to Kanter (1977a) can lead to the token being relegated to stereotypical roles, community orientated assignments or support roles. This role entrapment then excludes them from the more prestigious or higher-status, higher-

paying roles (Stroshine and Brandl 2001). If this is the case, then it may explain the low numbers in recruitment and the lower retention rates among these groups.

## Method

In 2008, the Queensland Police Service ('QPS'), through the Equity and Diversity Unit and the Cultural Advisory Unit, agreed to work with the authors on a study of the employment system for Indigenous female officers. The primary aim of the project was to identify barriers to employment, retention and integration, with the ultimate aim of identifying mechanisms to improve Indigenous women's participation in policing. The focus was therefore on this component of the Royal Commission recommendations, while the Queensland Crime and Misconduct Commission was engaged at the time in its much wider review of crime and policing in Indigenous communities.

A mixed method was developed for the Indigenous women police study, incorporating official data and a survey. Study 1 involved the collection of official documentation regarding current recruitment, training and employment policies and practices for Indigenous people, along with available workforce data. For Study 2, a questionnaire was designed to obtain the views of Indigenous female officers about their experiences. Given the enormous geographic area covered by the QPS, a written questionnaire was deemed the most practical way of reaching as many participants as possible, while ensuring anonymity.

Permission to conduct the research was granted in March 2008 by Police Commissioner Atkinson. The survey instrument contained 31 questions. Questions 1–8 included demographic characteristics such as age, marital status, educational attainment and kinship responsibilities. Questions 9–14 focused on experiences with the selection and training processes. Questions 15–31 centred on employment-related matters, such as individual and organisational decision making, operational issues and long-term career expectations. A population of 90 Indigenous female officers comprising both sworn and unsworn positions within the QPS was identified from Police personnel records. These were officers self-identifying as Indigenous, which may entail some under-counting. After being sent questionnaires (see below) three of these people reported they were not Indigenous. This left a population of 87: 64 sworn officers at various ranks and 23 unsworn liaison officers.

Questionnaires were disseminated in September 2008 by general post to recipients' work addresses. The self-addressed return envelopes were mailed to the researchers, at a university address, where the questionnaires were issued a code number. After 30 questionnaires were returned, QPS staff sent a follow-up email encouraging participation in the project. By December 2008, a total of 56 questionnaires were returned, representing a response rate of 64.3 per cent. This included 21 Indigenous PLOs (91 per cent of the population) and 35 sworn Indigenous officers (55 per cent of the population).

The employment of a questionnaire presented a number of limitations which are characteristic of this methodology (Neuman 2006:ch10). Questionnaires can limit the ability to probe in-depth aspects of an issue, although survey results can be used to inform more in-depth research through instruments such as interviews. Respondents were, nonetheless, given a number of opportunities in the questionnaire to provide further explanatory comments. The survey therefore allowed for some depth in understanding the issues and represented a useful means of informing further research. All respondents were informed that, following the completion of the research, a copy was available to them upon request.

## Findings

### *Study 1: Queensland Police Service Indigenous employment*

In 2008, the QPS recruitment system included basic standards of health, fitness and integrity, along with first aid and driving qualifications. These criteria applied to all applicants. There were then three ongoing programs as part of the pre-appointment training process, depending on applicants' backgrounds. Indigenous women were free to apply to any of the programs depending on their qualifications and experience. First, the Police Recruit Operational Vocational Education ('PROVE') Program was the main training program, involving 30 weeks at either of the Brisbane or Townsville academies. Graduates from PROVE were inducted as Constables of Police and joined the First Year Constable Program, during which they received further training and development on the job. Entry into PROVE was competitive and applicants were rank ordered according to a mix of employment and educational criteria, as shown in Table 1. Second, the Police Abridged Competency Education ('PACE') Program was available for police from New Zealand and other jurisdictions in Australia wishing to work in Queensland.

**Table 1:** Stage 1: Minimum application requirements, QPS, 2009

<b>Full-time employment experience</b>	<b>Required study</b>
Less than 3 years employment	The successful completion of 3 or more full-time semesters of accredited study (or equivalent) within a Bachelor degree course, or a completed accredited Diploma
Between 3 and 5 years employment	Minimum of 400 hours of Diploma-level study (comprising at least 200 hours of level IV subjects or higher), or 8 subjects of a Bachelor degree
More than 5 years employment	Minimum of 200 hours of Diploma-level study (level IV subjects or higher), or 4 subjects of a Bachelor degree

Source: Queensland Police 2009b:2

Third, the Justice Entry Program ('JEP') was specifically designed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants who did not meet the educational criteria for PROVE. The JEP was introduced in March 2003 as a successor to a special-entry program initiated in 1992 following the Royal Commission. The initial program involved potential Indigenous recruits completing a bridging program at Certificate level at technical colleges in Brisbane and north Queensland before entering the academy. The limited success of the program led to the JEP, which is more of a traineeship that included a salary. A mixture of secondary-level education, employment and life skills was considered to determine eligibility. The program operated as a full-time course over a six-month period, conducted at both police academies. On completion of the JEP, participants received a First Aid Certificate and a Certificate IV in Justice (Aboriginal People and Torres Strait Islander People) — an Australian National Training Authority approved qualification. JEP graduates were eligible for entry into the PROVE Program, subject to the competitive process. By mid-2008, out of 74 persons who began the program, 43 had been sworn in as Constables.

JEP graduates were also eligible to apply for employment as PLOs. The QPS PLO Program was developed in response to Recommendation 231 of the Royal Commission (see above). Originally the program was focused on diversion from police custody and assisting

police to communicate more appropriately and effectively with Indigenous people. PLOs were expected to:

foster communication, trust and understanding between the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, the Queensland Police Service and members of the broader community, in order to reduce and prevent crime (Queensland Police 2009a:2).

The PLO role was an unsworn position. Effectively, a PLO was a ‘civilian in uniform’, without the statutory powers and partial immunities of police officers. The PLOs did, nonetheless, have normal citizen powers and could intervene and make arrests in some situations, and also assist police in law enforcement duties. Training of PLOs involved a two-week induction course held at the academy, which focused on the employee’s rights, duties, entitlements and obligations in relation to the QPS. Indigenous PLOs were not necessarily assigned to Indigenous communities; they could be assigned to communities with more diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Although First Year Constables and PLOs were able to request specific locations for deployment, preferences could not always be met. Officers above this rank were able to apply for advertised positions in areas of their choice, as could PLOs wishing to transfer to other areas (Queensland Police 2009a). For the present study, in July 2009, a search of the QPS database showed that Indigenous officers accounted for 80 per cent of PLOs. Only four Indigenous PLOs resigned over the period 1 April 2000 and 30 June 2009. One was a woman. Reasons for resignations were not available.

Data provided by the QPS indicated that the proportion of women police officers as part of the total force slowly increased over the 1990s after the key events of the 1989 Fitzgerald report into corruption and maladministration, the 1991 final report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, and the introduction of two Queensland Acts: the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991* and the *Equal Opportunity in Public Employment Act 1992*. The number of female officers increased from 1153 or 16.1 per cent in 1998 to 2569 or 25.1 per cent in 2008. However, it was not possible to trace the number of female Indigenous officers across this period. As reported above, 87 Indigenous female officers were identified specifically for this project, including 23 unsworn liaison officers and 64 sworn officers at various ranks. The latter therefore accounted for 2.5 per cent of all female sworn officers.

### ***Study 2: Survey of Indigenous female officers***

The findings for Study 2 are predominantly descriptive. Due to the limited research in this area they were intended to elicit particular themes which could be utilised in a more comprehensive study. As reported in the method section, there were 56 respondents to the survey, including 35 police officers and 21 PLOs. For both groups, just over one-fifth (12 or 21 per cent) were aged 20–29 years, and a similar proportion was aged 40–49 years. Those aged 30–39 (23) accounted for 55 per cent of the group, while those aged 50–59 years made up 16 per cent (9). Approximately one-quarter were single and an additional quarter indicated they were divorced. The majority (27 or 48 per cent) reported that they were married or in a de facto relationship. Nearly half (25 or 46 per cent) had one or more dependent children or other dependants including aged parents or relatives. Seven of the respondents with no dependent children had other dependants. A further six respondents indicated that they provided care for both dependent children and other dependants. In total, just over two-thirds (68 per cent) were caring for at least one other family member.

Length of service data for sworn and unsworn respondents showed considerable longevity: seven (12.5 per cent) had worked in the QPS for 15 years or more,

while 15 (26.7 per cent) had served 10–14 years, 11 (19.6 per cent) had served 5–9 years, and 23 (41.1 per cent) had served for four years or less. Table 2 shows the length of time that respondents had been at their current rank. It can be seen that there were no sworn respondents in senior management positions (Inspector and above), with the majority at the rank of Constable. Just over 80 per cent of the sworn officers held their current rank for less than four years, compared to just under 62 per cent of the PLOs.

**Table 2:** Length of time at current rank

Position	<12 months	1–4 years	5–9 years	10–14 years	15+ years
Police Liaison Officer	9.5% (2)	33.3% (7)	0.0% (0)	4.7% (1)	0.0% (0)
Senior Police Liaison Officer	4.7% (1)	14.2% (3)	19.0% (4)	9.5% (2)	4.7% (1)
Recruit	2.8% (1)				
Constable	14.3% (5)	34.3% (12)	0.8% (1)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)
Senior Constable	8.6% (3)	11.4% (4)	5.7% (2)	2.8% (1)	5.7% (2)
Sergeant and above	2.8% (1)	8.6% (3)			

When it came to qualifications, just over half of the respondents had obtained a diploma, trade certificate, degree or higher degree. One-quarter had completed secondary education and approximately one-fifth had completed some secondary schooling. It was not clear whether tertiary qualifications were achieved prior to or after joining the QPS. The data did not show a strong correlation between educational achievement and rank, but rather between rank and duration of service. For example, those holding the rank of sergeant or above had extensive periods of service (generally 10 years and longer) but no formal post-secondary qualifications.

Table 3 show respondents' reasons for seeking employment with the QPS. 'Assisting the community' and 'providing a positive role model' were common themes. Two officers articulated the following:

[To] be more responsible for the Indigenous community, and be reassured that there are Indigenous people within the police service (#8)

To help my people remain out of the legal system — mainly children (#46).

Police work itself was also a primary motivator. This included almost 20 per cent of respondents mentioning that they had 'always wanted to be a police officer'; with the remainder of respondents viewing the service as providing a 'career challenge', 'job security' and a 'variety of work'. Of the PLO respondents, 14 (70 per cent) indicated that they had applied or considered applying to be a sworn officer. However, over a third (38 per cent) had applied and not completed the process. A few respondents had been unable to qualify despite having completed the initial training. Of those who did not complete the process, family commitments or a perceived inability to graduate were the main reasons given for this outcome. Of those who had not considered applying as a sworn officer, a mixture of explanations was provided, including 'personal considerations' (age, caring responsibilities) or simply a preference for the PLO role itself. In general, however, the



majority of PLO respondents (38 per cent) indicated that age was a factor, with a further 25 per cent saying they felt they were best suited to the PLO role.

**Table 3:** Reasons for seeking employment with QPS

Career challenge	16.1% (9)	Job security	10.7% (6)
Assist community	19.6% (11)	Always wanted to join police	17.9% (10)
Role model	10.7% (6)	No real reason	8.9% (5)
Variety of work	10.7% (6)	No response	5.4% (3)

Respondents were generally positive about their experiences of recruitment and training. Over three-quarters (78 per cent) viewed the recruitment process as culturally appropriate, while 14 per cent (8) felt it was not appropriate. Of those saying recruitment was not culturally appropriate, all but one had joined the QPS prior to the introduction of the JEP. A total of 94 per cent of sworn officers and 58 per cent of PLOs rated the training as valuable to some or a large extent. Of the seven respondents who did not feel that the training was valuable, six were PLOs (nearly one-third of the PLOs in the survey). In relation to recruitment, feedback from participants also highlighted the value they placed on a more applied ‘real-life’ perspective as a better preparation for general policing duties. One respondent (#50) stated:

The QPS would probably attract suitable candidates and retain more police if life and general experience were taken into consideration. I understand that a police officer needs literacy, writing and communications skills. However, a lot of people have these abilities without having a certificate, diploma or degree.

Another questioned the relevance of standards in the physical test for recruiting sworn officers: ‘Lower the physical because I work with people who are sworn officers [who] would not be able to run 100 metres’ (#31). A third suggested that police work needed to be promoted more as a career among Indigenous young people: ‘More advertising through schools where it all starts — with our children’ (#25). Of the total respondents (sworn officers and PLOs), over 87 per cent indicated that prior learning should be accorded greater recognition in assessing applications to the QPS. One respondent stated: ‘PLOs have a greater understanding of what [the] police do than a civilian. Their previous on the job experience should count for something’ (#26). Just over 85 per cent felt that a mentoring system for Indigenous recruits during their first year as Constables would be beneficial.

When asked about personal experiences of inappropriate behaviour in the form of harassment or racism during training, 60 per cent of respondents reported they did not experience either behaviour. Of the remaining, 63 per cent of PLOs and 28 per cent of sworn officers reported experiencing these behaviours. Eleven explanatory comments were provided. There were recurring references to racist remarks and a perception that others believed that they had been given special consideration on the basis of Aboriginality. Examples include the following:

While in JEP, other recruits in PROVE assumed [that] we had an easy ticket — [they] are not educated properly in relation to what we do (#18).

Basically because we were known as ATSI trainees ... we were treated as if we were given our position because of our Aboriginality. [It was] deemed that we are given special considerations and opportunities because the QPS have to fill a quota. [There was] talk from other recruits stating that we will get through no matter what because we are Aboriginal (#38).

This group was also asked if they had reported the behaviour. Of the 40 per cent who had experienced inappropriate behaviour, over half (52 per cent) reported the behaviour. Of these, over a third (38 per cent) felt that the complaint had not be satisfactorily resolved, with some concerns being raised with respect to procedural issues associated with the complaints process.

Participants were also asked to report their perceptions of ongoing support in the form of training, development and promotion opportunities. Approximately two-thirds (65 per cent) considered that arrangements were sufficient or largely sufficient. However, there was a difference of opinion between sworn officers and the PLO respondents: 38 per cent (8) of PLOs reported that support was not sufficient, compared to only 14 per cent (8) of sworn officers. Some PLOs indicated that this was due to a disparity between the types of training programs and opportunities offered to them. Among sworn officers, 79 per cent reported that their deployments had been consistent with their preferences and they were happy with their current deployment. For those who were less satisfied, the primary reasons were a desire to work more closely with the Indigenous community and/or the preference to work in a specialised unit, such as child protection or the drug squad. A few PLOs expressed frustration with limited opportunities for promotion. Another stated, '[There is] no career structure for PLOs, no direction or guidance given. [We are] not part of the team — just floating' (#35). Another wrote, 'There are *NO* prospects for Senior PLOs — nowhere to go so I will sit and continue to support the community where I can' (#51). Another felt there needed to be 'better support and better opportunities to transfer' (#45).

Respondents were also asked to indicate whether they believed their gender or Aboriginality had impacted on their deployment. Almost half of the respondents (48 per cent) indicated that they believed that their gender had impacted on decisions by the QPS with respect to their deployment — either to some extent or to a large extent. Of those remaining, 25 per cent indicated they were unsure and 27 per cent thought their gender had not impacted on deployment decisions. Only slightly fewer respondents believed their Aboriginality had influenced their deployment (40 per cent) to some or a large extent, while 48 per cent of those responding felt it had no effect. Twelve per cent were unsure or did not indicate a view. When investigating the intersection of these two responses further, it was found that 19 per cent indicated that they felt that both gender and Aboriginality had impacted on QPS deployment decisions.

Respondents were also largely positive about their acceptance by the community in which they worked. Of those who did not work within a predominantly Indigenous community (32 or 57 per cent), all felt accepted to varying extents. Of those working in predominantly Indigenous communities (24 or 43 per cent), the large majority (83 per cent) felt that they were accepted by the community. In both environments an equal proportion of respondents felt they were accepted to a large extent — between 44 per cent and 45 per cent. Only one respondent commented on difficulties with 'being female and Aboriginal in an Aboriginal community' (#27). Another commented: 'I am accepted by my peers within the police family and offer guidance to my younger colleagues' (#5).

The majority of participants (72 per cent) indicated they felt their colleagues were culturally sensitive or competent to deal with Indigenous people within the community — either ‘to some extent’ (54 per cent) or ‘to a large extent’ (18 per cent). The remainder felt their colleagues were not culturally sensitive or competent to deal with Indigenous people within the community (21 per cent), or were unsure (7 per cent). The group who felt their colleagues were not culturally sensitive or competent were asked for suggestions for making improvements: 16 supported ‘regular in-house training/workshops’, while five stated ‘cannot be improved’. Some specific suggestions included the following:

Encourage non-Indigenous QPS employees to participate in Indigenous events and make the workplace more culturally appropriate, not just doing 2 day cross-cultural awareness courses (#2).

Non-Indigenous officers [need] more knowledge of ATSI culture. Show respect for PLO and Indigenous officers within the Service (#10).

Cultural awareness training is needed. First year Constables are participating in this training, why not the whole State? You never know when you are going to be transferred to an Indigenous community (#30).

I believe that all cultural awareness training should be made compulsory and updated every year the same way firearms training ... OST [Operational Skills and Tactics] training are compulsory. (#56).

When it came to being accepted by colleagues, the large majority (89 per cent) of sworn officers and PLOs reported feeling accepted — either ‘to some extent’ (21 per cent) or ‘a large extent’ (68 per cent). The three respondents who reported not feeling accepted held PLO positions. Of the three respondents who were ‘unsure’, all three were sworn officers. At the same time, when asked about their role within the QPS, 33 per cent of PLOs (7) replied ‘Undervalued and/or underutilised’. One PLO described the liaison position as ‘just an “add on” that they [QPS] use when they have got themselves into a tight spot’ (#51). Another referred to being ‘a secondary officer when numbers are down, used to do police officer duties and when we aren’t needed are quickly told what our roles are’ (#8). However, others described their role in positive terms: ‘to liaise between the QPS and the community’ (33 per cent) and/or as ‘a benefit to the community’ (24 per cent). One PLO stated:

I believe that the Police Liaison Officers in Qld are some of the best Liaison officers in Australia. We have had a rough beginning, being one of the recommendations from the deaths in custody report but have made this job our own, making a better community for our children to grow up in (#51).

Questions were also asked about whether or not respondents had considered resigning from the QPS. Just under half (48 per cent) had not considered resigning. Reasons given in free text included the following:

This is the job I have always wanted from year 10. I love the job and plan on staying in it (#11).

Great support from fellow colleagues at my first station (#18).

Good job security and opportunities to do what you want if you show initiative (#24).

Only just started the career, [the] work is interesting and challenging in a good way (#41).

I work in Indigenous communities with Indigenous youth...this is my passion and I love the role (#2).

Just over half (52 per cent) of all respondents indicated that they had considered resigning. The rate was higher for PLOs (62 per cent) than for sworn officers (46 per cent). For PLOs, the main reasons given were 'lack of support from sworn officers on the job' (5) and 'racism and harassment from other staff members' (3). For the sworn officers, the main reasons were 'family commitments' (4), 'racism/harassment' (4) and 'lack of support from management' (3). Table 4 shows reasons for not resigning for those who considered resigning. For sworn officers, reasons were mainly related to 'job security' (5) and 'love of the job' (4). The main reasons given by PLOs were 'financial stability' (5) and 'making a difference within the community', including serving as a 'role model' (4). One PLO stated: 'I am able to make a difference, I believe, from both sides of the fence. Slow and steady wins the race' (#23).

**Table 4:** Participants who had considered resigning: Reasons for remaining with the QPS

	Financial stability	Love the job	Community: Make a difference or role model	Support from colleagues	Job security	Just started or new position
PLOs	38.5% (5)	7.7% (1)	30.7% (4)	7.7% (1)	7.7% (1)	7.7% (1)
Sworn officers	6.2% (1)	25.0% (4)	12.5% (2)	18.7% (3)	31.2% (5)	6.2% (1)

## Discussion

The results of this study indicate that it is possible for police departments to recruit substantial numbers of Indigenous women police and retain them in roles that they find worthwhile. However, this may require a more targeted commitment by police services with regard to recruitment strategies and the collection of more comprehensive data. Study 1, utilising official documents and data, indicated that the QPS, largely through the establishment of the JEP, has attempted to recruit Indigenous men and women. Given the well-documented obstacles to success, the employment of at least 87 Indigenous women in sworn and liaison officer roles was commendable. The JEP appears to be a worthwhile application of the Royal Commission recommendations regarding the introduction of bridging courses and supportive group training. Eighty-one people have commenced the JEP traineeship since its inception in 2003, with 67 people graduating with a Certificate IV in Justice and, of those, 62 graduates entered the PROVE Program as police recruits. Unfortunately, there appeared to be no official records as to why the remaining 14 people had not graduated from the program. However, it was suggested that some applicants had left for family reasons and others had been unable to successfully completed the psychological evaluation requirement of the PROVE Program.

At the same time, it must be said that there was no evidence, in QPS policies and procedures, of an explicit focus on Indigenous women, as recommended by the Commission. It seemed to be more the case that Indigenous women were welcomed along with Indigenous men. Nor was there any evidence of a policy that addressed the issue, outlined in the literature review, about the different purposes for encouraging female Indigenous employment in policing. Is the focus on employment equity or on improved

policing? The study also found that the QPS did not have data on the impacts of the JEP on Royal Commission goals of improving police-community relations, protecting victims, and reducing Indigenous offending and over-representation at all stages of the criminal justice system — including arrest and police custody.

Study 2, which utilised a survey of Indigenous female officers, although predominantly descriptive, made a number of useful findings. The survey showed that Indigenous women generally had positive views of the recruitment process and training they experienced, as well as positive views on career support and their acceptance within the QPS and within the various communities they served. It appeared that where respondents felt gender or race played a part in organisational decisions, gender figured only slightly more predominantly than race; although it was notable that of those who answered in the affirmative, just under half indicated that they felt both gender and race had an impact. The survey also showed that the officers were motivated by service to the community and an intrinsic interest in police work and were likely to stay in the job because of these factors. Extended family commitments also highlighted the lack of targeted strategies, such as flexible working hours, aimed at assisting those women who cared for family members living with them. Working with the Indigenous community and contributing to the community were motivators, especially for those seeking to adopt police liaison roles. This is not unusual, as Indigenous careers are often chosen for the benefit of the community rather than the individual (Juntanen et al 2001; Riley 2002), and these views resonate with Royal Commission goals. But, despite these generally positive findings, some problematic areas were identified, such as experiences of inappropriate behaviour during training and within the workplace, including lack of satisfaction with complaint resolution. This may be due in part to the traditionally perceived ‘masculine’ nature of the occupation and the hierarchical nature of the policing organisation, which has long accepted displays of sexism and racism. Further, in accordance with Tokenism theory, these findings tended to confirm the view that Indigenous women occupied the marginal statuses of both race and gender. This then bestowed on them the status of ‘double tokens’ (Gustafson 2008:5), which may account for the more stereotypical community or support roles they occupied within a historically male-dominated organisation.

The Crime and Misconduct Commission (2009) review of crime and policing in Indigenous communities in Queensland was critical of the PLO system and indicated it should be abandoned in favour of an enhanced QATSIP scheme that would give greater powers, status and support to Indigenous officers (see also Cunneen et al 2005:183–7). However, there is currently nothing to indicate that this type of initiative would not face the same problems as the PLO program. The survey findings in the present study, although less negative than those of the Crime and Misconduct Commission report concerning the marginalisation of PLOs and rejection by Indigenous community members (2009:161, 169), still found some support for themes of marginalisation from a female PLO perspective. Further, many of the comments received by the PLOs were consistent with the findings of Cherney and Chui’s (2007) study in that many of the respondents felt that they were under-utilised and under-valued within the QPS, and that often their role was misconstrued by many of the sworn officers.

The Crime and Misconduct Commission report also indicated that, despite the ‘success’ of the JEP in improving Indigenous recruitment, the number of sworn Indigenous officers was still far too small, and it suggested that enhanced recruitment strategies were needed. While silent on the issue of Indigenous female officers, the report recommended greater use of ‘block intakes’, more mentoring by serving Indigenous officers, and recruitment targeted at Indigenous communities (Crime and Misconduct Commission 2009:168). The survey of

Indigenous female officers also provided support for some key Crime and Misconduct Commission recommendations, including the need for a more developed mentoring support program (see also Cherney and Chui 2007, 2010, 2011; Day et al 2004). In addition, the survey supported the case for exploring options for greater recognition of prior learning to allow PLOs to move into fully sworn positions, and creating clearer pathways from PLO positions to Constable status (cf Cunneen et al 2005:186). Recent research on the problem of falling growth in female police numbers in Australia and elsewhere has also supported the need for renewed recruitment efforts and experimentation with forms of affirmative action to improve gender equity (Cordner and Cordner 2011; Prenzler et al 2010).

## Conclusion

This article examines the status of Indigenous women police in Queensland. Although no policies are in place by QPS particularly targeting Indigenous female officers, the establishment of the JEP program does support potential Indigenous applicants to obtain the relevant educational qualifications. In accordance with the findings of Cherney and Chui's (2007) study, it is apparent that the PLO role may need to be defined more clearly within the organisation so that the formal and informal expectations of these officers and their colleagues are less ambiguous. Further training opportunities would also assist PLOs in establishing a more progressive career path.

The survey of all officers indicated high levels of acceptance within the organisation and high levels of satisfaction with the conditions of employment and nature of the work. At the same time, there were indicators that there was room for improvement, including through a greater organisational commitment to experimenting with different strategies to increase target group participation, career mobility and capacity to contribute to policing goals. As the nature of post-Fitzgerald Inquiry politics in Queensland is similar to those of other states and territories, this case study provides a partial model for other jurisdictions. The analysis also highlighted the paradox for police departments in their reasons for recruiting more women and minority groups: whether for employment equity reasons or to achieve concrete policing objectives, such as improved community relations and reductions in crime.

## Legislation

*Anti-Discrimination Act 1991* (Qld)

*Equal Opportunity in Public Employment Act 1992* (Qld)

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